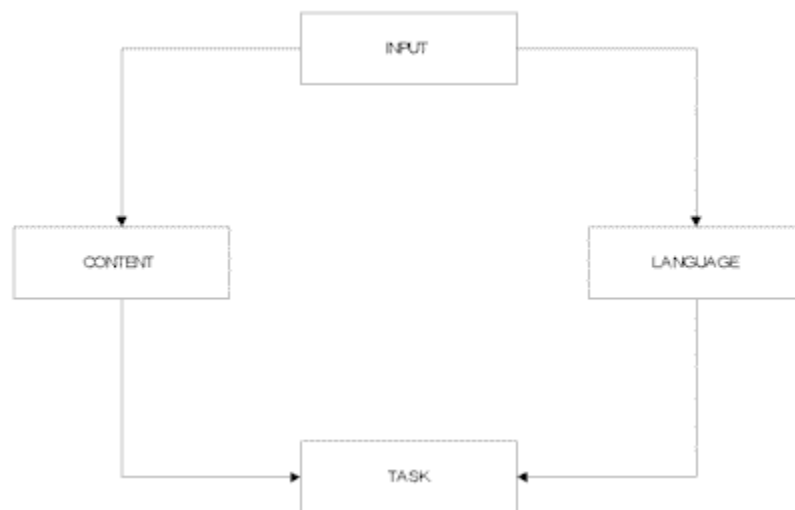# A Model for Developing Coherence and Authenticity in ESP Materials

*By Patrisius Djiwandono*

This paper proposes a framework for materials development. (see Footnote 1 below) It will set forth an example of a lesson unit for secretarial students, as a starting point for discussing task authenticity and coherence between tasks.

The lesson unit draws upon the interaction of input, language, content, and task. Such interaction is depicted as follows:

INPUT

CONTENT

LANGUAGE

TASK

The main focus of the lesson unit is the task. Thus, the whole framework is aimed at enabling the students to carry out the task, with *language* and *content* drawn from the input and selected according to what the learners need to complete the task. The *task* itself constitutes a number of activities that train the students to deal with situations relating to their future employment.

The *input* serves as a starting point for the learners to use information-processing skills. It generates the topic, language items, and stimulus material for subsequent activities. Figure 1 below gives the order of the tasks in the lesson unit.

## The Input Text for the Lesson Unit

A considerable debate revolves around the issue of whether to use authentic text or adapted text in an ESP lesson unit. Philips and Shettlesworth (1988:105) maintain that adapted texts have two major shortcomings: 1) they do not prepare students to deal with authentic materials, and 2) simplification distorts the text, making it potentially difficult to comprehend. They argue that

adapted, simplified texts fall short of maintaining the originality of the subject matter, resulting in inaccurate content. On the other hand, Allen and Widdowson (cited in McDonough, 1984:76) contend that specially-written texts can exclude unnecessarily distracting, idiosyncratic style without losing the valuable communicative features or concepts of the real texts. More importantly, there are some vital factors that are more critical than just being unlike the target text. McDonough (1984:77) lists three of them: available time; student interest and motivation; and the goals of the ESP course. McDonough favors having "a fabricated text with a range of authentic tasks."

These considerations put constraints on text selection. Longer time periods might allow for special texts to serve as stepping stones to target texts. Instead of using an actual recording from a real office-which might contain abbreviated exchanges and little redundancy-a contrived text might be used as input to accommodate the learners' present proficiency level. The materials writer can design the input text herself/himself, building in redundancy and known vocabulary items, then having a native speaker read the text for an audio recording.

In line with McDonough's point above, the input text embodies in itself some tasks that a secretary normally performs, i.e. listening to her boss's instructions and transferring some of the oral information into some sort of diagrammatic forms (list, notes, agenda, etc.) The transferred information later serves as a basis for completing other tasks, all approximating real job tasks. Thus, though not authentic, the input text still yields some authentic tasks for the students. This will appeal to students who look forward to having class experiences simulate target situations.

Hutchinson and Waters (1991:108) list several criteria for a satisfactory input text. To function effectively, the input text should provide stimulus activities, new language items, correct models of language use, a topic for communication, and opportunities for learners to use their existing knowledge.

### Task 1: Information transfer

After listening to the input text, the students have to transfer the oral information onto a list (See Figure 2 below). There are a number of reasons why they are asked to do this.

First, one needs to consider the target situation where the students would eventually use English. When our students enter the work world, a part of their daily routine will be to attend to information transmitted orally or written in memos or letters; later they must transfer this information to another intelligible format. The information transfer task is, therefore, authentic, since it approximates a real job demand.

Secondly, the task fosters the development of new learning skills. Part of the content that the students have to learn is vocabulary, and to some extent this requires a degree of repetition combined with attention (Nation, 1990:67). This requirement is sufficiently met in the information transfer task, because it incorporates repetition of certain structures (Palmer, 1982:29).

Another advantage is that the task promotes an active process inside the learner's mind. Clearly, when preoccupied with the listen and transfer task, students proceed in a thinking fashion.

Finally, the information transfer task carries potential for subsequent tasks. As Palmer (1982:30) notes, it forms a kind of pivot around which any of the language skills may revolve.

### Task 2: The language focus

The next task after the completion of the list is doing "accuracy work" in the area of vocabulary and sentence construction. Such work is necessary to prepare for the subsequent task which requires students to write out full letters. The language focus trains the students to master specific sub-skills in writing letters to specific audiences. Accordingly, the exercise in the language focus gets them to deal with sentence constructions and vocabulary items that later will be used-with slight grammatical adjustments-in the letters. This exercise puts emphasis on accuracy, and the rationale behind this is that "all learners require such predictable and controlled workouts at times if their goal is to achieve accuracy in language production" (Dubin and Ohlstain, 1988:96). It goes without saying that accuracy is a vital element in writing business letters.

Also in line with this is a view set forth by Hutchinson and Waters (1991:109) that good material should involve opportunities for analysis and synthesis of the language. In order for learners to use language, they should be given a chance to take the language apart, study its components, and put them back together again in a meaningful, purposeful way.

### Task 3: Writing letters

The task following the accuracy practice is writing letters to both the successful applicants and the unsuccessful ones. In a real situation this is exactly what a secretary would do after receiving the information from her supervisor. He might have to impart the message to other external parties (government workers, travel agents, or other office sections) orally or in writing. So, the writing task is nothing but a logical continuation of the previous task of completing the list.

The students create their own version of letters within the parameters of vocabulary and sentence structures they have just practiced. They employ their previous knowledge about writing letters-obtained from their basic business writing course taught in the previous semester-and exploit it to help with a task at hand. The principle underlying this is that learning can only take place effectively if the learners actively make use of their existing knowledge to solve the problem they are dealing with.

### Task 4: Simulation in telephoning

The next task puts the students in a situation where they have to clarify certain matters by ringing up the university registrar. In this task, simulation is deemed suitable for a number of reasons. First, such a framework brings the students closer to the real situation in terms of roles, topics, and register. Secondly, the essential pedagogical feature of a simulation is that it is based on problem-solving. Littlejohn and Windeatt (1989:164) state that language learning is largely

incidental and people can learn a language while thinking about the solution to a problem which is not a language problem. What is important is that the problem should make the learners use the language. Moreover, as McDonough (1984:97) points out, ESP is a teaching/learning program whose foremost characteristic is problem-solving.

### Task 5: Writing follow-up letters

The last task logically follows the result of the telephone conversation: the students are to inform the applicant of the exact dates of enrollment and arrival. This also represents target performance.

Like the previous writing task, the students are given freedom to create their own letters, so long as they convey the main idea outlined in the unit. This last task draws upon the learning principle that the internalization of new materials is greatly fostered by the activation of the learners' relevant background knowledge.

## Coherence Between Tasks

One criterion of coherence in a task unit is the existence of recycling from one exercise to another (Hutchinson and Waters 1991:124). Thus, one task should generate output or outcome that can be used for the ensuing task(s). The unit being discussed has proceeded in this fashion. It starts with listening to an input text which results in data processing (in list format) by the students. These data become the basis for creating sentences using vocabulary and content from the list. This output is then used in its actual context in the next task, i.e. letters.

In the group work and simulated telephone conversation, the students have to draw on specific information from their previously completed list. This links the simulation to the first task. Finally, the students turn to their last task of writing follow-up letters. In so doing, they have to draw upon information obtained in their telephone conversations. Again, this exemplifies the coherence between the last two tasks.

This paper has given a model for the design of a lesson unit based upon the interaction between input, language, content, and task. The input segment gives the topic, while the language and content segments give the linguistic forms and meaning necessary to complete specific tasks. (See Figure 3 below). The information transfer in the first task is particularly useful because it generates so many activities that are coherently linked to one another. Each task turns out data which is then used for doing the next tasks. This chained network characterizes the lesson unit.

**Patrisius Djiwandono** is a lecturer at Widya Karya Catholic University in Malang, Indonesia. He recently finished his Master's program in Language Education at the Post Graduate Program of IKIP Malang.

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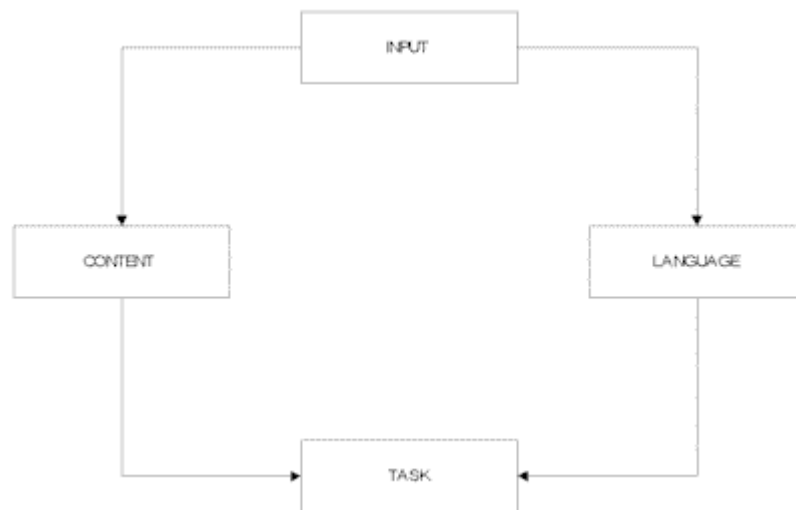
**INDONESIA**

# A Model for Developing Coherence and Authenticity in ESP Materials

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## Figure 1

TASK 1: Information Transfer

| | The students complete a list according to recorded oral instructions from a New Zealand government officer. Topic: admission of overseas students to New Zealand universities. | INPUT |
|---|---|---|

## TASK 2: Language Focus

The students practice making sentence and using some vocabulary items for the INPUT.  LANGUAGE

## TASK 3: Writing Letters

The students write letters to the applicants.  CONTENT

## TASK 4: Telephone Conversation

The students get in groups to prepare a telephone conversation. Then, they perform a simulated telephone conversation.

## TASK 5: Writing Follow-up Letter

The students write a letter to a new applicant based on the previous telephone conversation.

## Figure 2

The list of overseas applicants for New Zealand Universities.

| No | 1 Name | 2 Country | 3 University | 4 Course | 5 Date of Enrol. | 6 Date of Arrival |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | B. Santoso | Indonesia | Victoria, Univ. of Auckland | | | |
| 2 | Suyati | Indonesia | Univ. of Canterbury, Lincoln Univ. | | | |
| 3 | C. Liong | China | Massey Univ. | | | |
| 4 | M. Ahmad | Malaysia | Victoria | | | |
| 5 | Somaji | Thailand | Univ. of Auckland, Univ. of Canterbury | | | |

## Figure 3
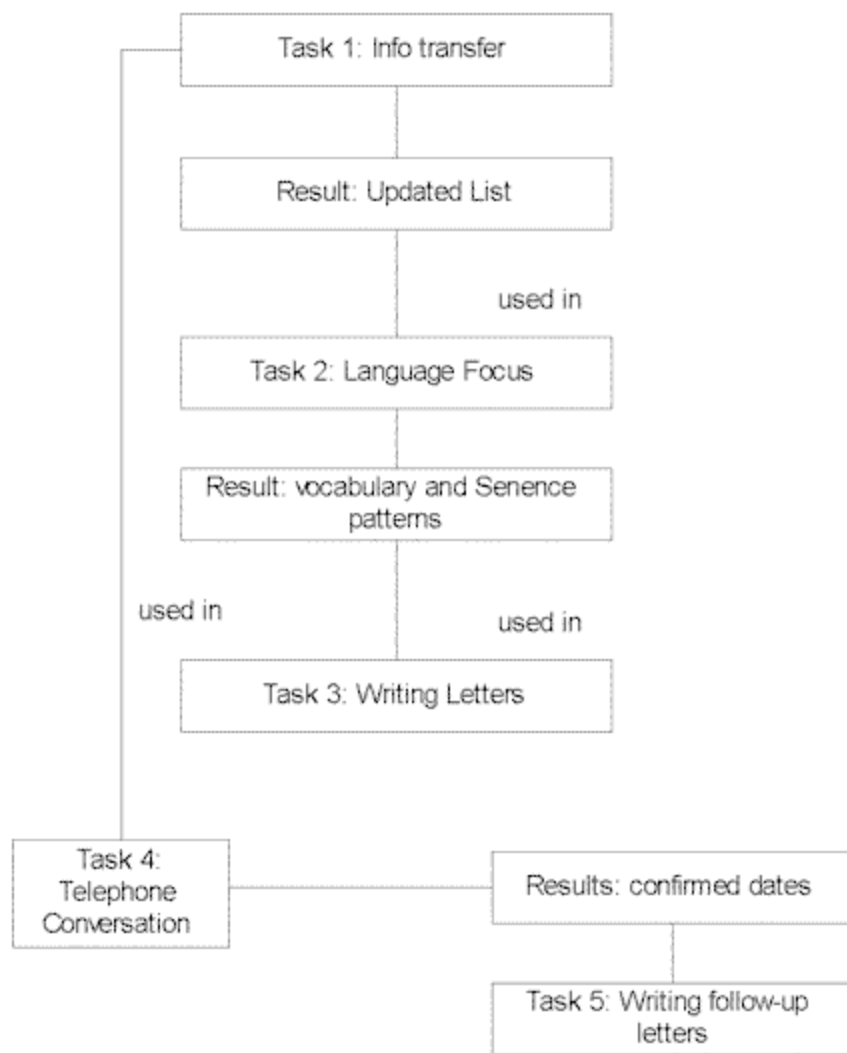
## Footnote 1

A version of this paper was presented at the 40th TEFLIN (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia) Seminar on February 5, 1993 at Brawijaya University, Malang, Indonesia.